



EDITORIAL

A member of the



**Philippine
Press
Institute**

The National Association of Philippine Newspapers

Vaccine imports are finally arriving

PATIENCE has finally paid off for Filipinos as we were informed by regular news media about two positive developments in the area of COVID-19 vaccine procurement by the government.

Vaccine czar Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. and Health Secretary Francisco Duque III announced the signing last Saturday of an agreement for the delivery of 40 million doses of the vaccine developed by American multinational Pfizer Inc. and German biotechnology firm BioNTech SE.

Secretary Galvez called it the "biggest and most decisive deal we have for 2021," which, going by the huge number of doses, is true. This single contract will "significantly boost our national immunization program and will enable us to realize our goal of achieving herd immunity by year-end." By "herd immunity," the government means effective immunity from the coronavirus 2019 by vaccinating at least 70 percent of the nation's population of 110 million.

'Together with the donated vaccines from the COVAX Facility, these should be enough for the vaccine needs of the country.'

In another development, Ambassador to the US Jose Romualdez said some 300,000 Moderna COVID-19 vaccine doses purchased by the government and the private sector will arrive in the Philippines on June 27. There have been some delays in the shipment's arrival, but this is just expected because logistical challenges such as transportation and storage facilities are present both in the point of origin and here, and considering that vaccines are fragile goods that have to be kept at certain low temperatures during transport.

Ambassador Romualdez said the country can expect "bigger shipments" by July and August. The Pfizer jabs, meanwhile, will begin arriving in October.

In the case of Pfizer, the company will be paid directly by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), from which the Philippines borrowed \$400 million for the purchase of vaccines. This is what President Duterte mentioned in a televised talk several months ago, assuring Filipinos that there is no opportunity for corruption because the funds are transferred directly from the bank to the pharmaceutical company.

The latest tally showed that the government purchased 113 million vaccine doses this year, including the 26 million CoronaVac, 10 million Sputnik V, 20 million Moderna and 17 million AstraZeneca doses. Also, negotiations are ongoing for the supply of an estimated total of 16 million doses from Novavax and Johnson & Johnson. Together with the donated vaccines from the COVAX Facility, these should be enough for the vaccine needs of the country.

The nitpickers and traditional critics of the Duterte administration are obviously quiet about these developments, for their sights are only made to see the negative. Galvez, Romualdez, Duque and the private sector led by Joey Concepcion should be encouraged in their activities to bring the vaccines to the Philippines.